

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL STEVEN MAINS AND MIKE MCCOY FROM THE CENTER FOR ARMY LESSONS LEARNED SUBJECT: THE RECENTLY RELEASED PRT HANDBOOK MODERATOR: JACK HOLT, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 12:04 P.M. EDT DATE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2007

-----  
Copyright (c) 2007 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call(202)347-1400  
-----

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much.

Let's see, we've got Andrew Lubin online along with Bruce McQuain and Matt Armstrong. And we've got a few more that had said that they were going to join us. We'll see if they do. We can go ahead and get started and then we can add them as they join us, if you'd like.

COL. MAINS: Terrific, Jack.

And again, we were able to do these things on a fairly regular basis from downrange. Just so we can set ground rules, everything is on the record and for attribution. And if there are any follow-up questions that are more specific, please feel free to contact either Phil or myself and we can make sure that we could get you responses. MR. HOLT: All right, very good. And everybody has my e-mail address. So in that regard, if you've got any follow-up question or things that we don't get addressed here, just e-mail me. I will forward to them and get you guys hooked up on a one-to-one communication basis there.

And I'd just like to remind you guys once again that when it comes your time for the -- in the question-and-answer, to identify yourself and your publication, and we will go from there.

So with that, Colonel Mains, Mr. McCoy, if you guys are ready we can -- if you've got an opening statements for us we'll begin.

COL. MAINS: Okay. This is Colonel Steve Mains. I'm the director of the Center for Army Lessons Learned. And Mr. Mike McCoy was the lead analyst or is the lead analyst on our Provincial Reconstruction Team Playbook.

What I'd like to do is start off -- I'm sure from looking at the bios of the bloggers that we've got -- I'm sure that you are somewhat familiar with the Center for Army Lessons Learned, but just to kind of provide a, you know, a common base, let me just talk a little bit about what we do.

First, we're in the business of collecting what's really working in theater. And we have 15 embedded theater observers that are in divisions, separate brigades, MNFI, coalition -- what's it called? I'm sorry -- ISAF in Afghanistan. And down -- even if a battalion is doing a specific mission we have embedded down to the battalion level as well, but we tend to kind of stay at brigade and division and the major headquarters.

So those 15 folks are in theater 24/7. We then have about 120 analysts and admin. editors, publications folks here in Fort Leavenworth. And then we've got about 60 folks that are out at the schools and all of the non-deployed division and corps level headquarters. So the idea is that we would collect information from theater and get it very quickly back to the schools and back to the units.

We have a dissemination mission and so we're not just disseminating kind of the raw data that we get from theater, but we would also write handbooks or newsletters, depending on the particular subject and what's necessary. We don't write doctrine. We don't write cultural histories or anything like that. What we try to do is if we see a gap in doctrine, if we see a gap in sort of instructions on how to do a particular mission, then we will step in and fill that gap with our handbooks.

We've done that on sniper operations -- although there's a lot of sniper doctrine out there, there was a lot of questions from the field on how to do sniper -- encounter sniper operations in the current operational environment. So we wrote a handbook on how to do that. We've written a bunch on, you know, how to stay alive in the first 100 days of combat -- both from the soldier and the leader's perspective -- and we're going to do one on staff here this fall. Base defense, combat outposts -- you know, those are the sorts of current topics that we can turn pretty quickly.

One of the areas that we identified really over the last winter was provincial reconstruction teams -- that guys were going out and putting together PRTs and operating, but there wasn't a whole lot of instruction for them on how to do that. So one of our theater observers wrote a PRT handbook that -- really, he wrote and then took it around to the Department of State, USAID, military members that were serving on PRTs in Iraq and kind of got their buy-in on it. We published that in February and then we followed up with an interagency publication or interagency effort where Department of State, USAID and U.S. Institute for Peace came in primarily and did a lot of the writing on what we call now the PRT Playbook that we just published in September.

So that's kind of in a nutshell what we do and what our mission is here on Fort Leavenworth and in the United States Army. And what I'd like to do then is to hand it over to Mike McCoy to talk just a little bit of the specifics on the playbook itself.

MR. MCCOY: Yeah. This is Mike McCoy, the lead analyst for this development on the PRT Playbook.

We worked with members from, as Colonel Mains said, the Department of State -- in particular the coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability; USAID with folks in the conflict management shop; as well as the Office of Military Affairs. We also, as Colonel Mains mentioned, had a -- what I called a graybeard from USIP to give us a -- somebody that wasn't in the fight -- a little bit of an overview to make sure we stayed on track. And we also had members from the Department of the Army, Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Agriculture that sat in with the work groups that we had.

We had about five or six meetings where we discussed things -- what should be in the playbook, what should not be in the playbook. We agreed that we needed to write a playbook that would be generic in nature and that would provide annexes that would be country specific and that's what we hoped we have accomplished with this thing.

Knowing that the generic reconstruction team is a hard thing to define and we need to refine on it a little bit more in the interagency process. And that's an ongoing project that is being worked with an interagency group in D.C. right now trying to get what this organization's going to look like. We also found out when we were developing this playbook that the playbook developed -- or the handbook developed by the ISAF in Afghanistan was a pretty good document for Afghanistan. And we wanted to make sure we didn't duplicate that process -- what they have said -- and I think we've done a good job with that. That's why the annex on Afghanistan is very thin is because we believe the playbook that ISAF produced is what we want to use -- our folks to use. What we try to make sure is that we only give U.S.-specific type actions.

So with that we also recognize we've got to get this playbook out in the field. And that's why we published it when we have, because we've got enough content here that people need to start working on it, training on it and items like that. But we also want this to be a U.S. government publication, so we're also working with Department of State and USAID to try to get them to coordinate within their offices, and that's not a simple affair when you deal with the interagency.

So we're kind of hoping that by the end of this calendar year that we'll actually have coordinated approval from all of the agencies and we can put -- instead of just a CALL logo or the combined armed center logo on here, we can have a Department of State logo, Department of Agriculture logo -- all the agencies' logo on here and it'd be a true U.S. government publication.

That's basically the background on the playbook and where we are today.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much.

And we'll start with the questions.

Once again, I'd like to remind you guys to identify yourself and your publication. And with that, let's start with Bruce McQuain.

Bruce.

Q Yes, gentlemen. Bruce McQuain with Qando.net.

My experience with CALL has always been outstanding getting the feedback when I was serving in that type thing. But what you guys are talking about here, as you've mentioned, is something that's going to go interagency. Obviously, it would seem to me that the value of CALL was the immediacy of the feedback. How are you going to manage that, having to run that through all these other agencies to make it pertinent to what's going on in the field now?

COL. MAINS: Yeah, Bruce, that's -- thank you very much, let me say, for that endorsement of what we do. I'm glad that you had good experiences with our products. And that probably -- you probably hit on our biggest difficulty.

When we were putting this together there was a large amount of content that was actually written by Department of State and USAID. But when it came time to actually put their logo on the cover, there's some difficulties with doing that -- not that they don't stand behind what they say, because they certainly to, but it's just very difficult in the interagency environment.

So we took the approach of going ahead and publishing as a CALL document, because we have the authority here at Fort Leavenworth to do that. Of course, we put the proper acknowledgements in there that -- of the folks that worked on it, and what we found was, we got it -- we published it under our own name with acknowledgments of the interagency players.

And now what we've found is that once it's been published, they are less reluctant to endorse it. USAID, in fact, has come up very strong, and it looks like we're going to get their complete endorsement, I think, fairly soon.

And certainly they said they were willing to be interviewed on their participation.

So I think that it's kind of a -- you know it's almost "chicken and the egg." We're able to jump-start it a little bit because of our ability here at Leavenworth, and I think we'll see more folks in the interagency community wanting to get their name on -- on these sorts of products in the future.

Q Given that, do you, then, feel that as you're proceeding here, this will become a simpler process?

COL. MAINS: Yes, I think so. I think once -- you know, once it kind of starts to happen, you know, people will be less afraid of it. You know, when there -- there really aren't a lot of interagency products out there right now, and so there's a -- it's a very cumbersome process.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And Andrew Lubin.

MR. LUBIN: Thanks, gentlemen. Andrew Lubin, from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. Thanks for taking the time.

To be a bit more specific, do you think that the PRTs need to be included in chain-of-command, or at least put off on a line parallel to the local commanding officer?

For example, I'm thinking about in Diyala Province in Baqubah, where the PRT leader was mentioning that he only gets two to four hours of electricity per day. He can't finish his whole economic reconstruction mission since there's no electricity, and he is no saying what anybody's going to do to, you know, to work on that problem.

MR. MCCOY: This is Mike McCoy, let me answer that the best that I can. There is definite pluses when you have a recognized chain of command that has the ability to perform actions, provide monies that help you in the way that you can do your business.

One of the issues that we see in Iraq, that we didn't see in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the PRTs' run up through military chain of command, but at the same time, the whole reconstruction effort, when it comes to PRTs in Afghanistan, is run by ISAF, a military organization.

When you look at Iraq, it's a slightly different flavor. And I think what you're seeing developing right now with the embedded PRTs, and the fact that the paired PRTs art starting to take on a, what I would consider a look that, in some regards, are they trying to make them embedded with the divisions -- question mark? I don't think they're trying to do that, but still they -- want to keep them separate entities. But our PRTs that exist out there, are out there with virtually no supporting mechanism with them. They have to rely on the people that they're with. So you pick a province in Iraq, and you'll find that they don't have very much money to support themselves. They have -- they're relying on the handout that are given from the division, or the brigade, or the battalion that happens to be next door to them.

And I think we're going to see that continue for awhile. But to say that -- do we want them part of the division? I don't know. That's a tough question. When reconstruction -- when we want other look at it in its true (?), does have to be a Department of State responsibility, and if we want it to be a Department of State responsibility, do we actually want these things in a military chain of command?

It's a question that's hard to answer. It's constantly being fought in D.C. And I'll be honest with you, I don't think we have a good "right answer" right now. We have seen that it works fairly better when it is assigned to the military, but the question is is that the right answer. And I don't think anybody has an answer for that one right now.

COL. MAINS: If I could add in -- this is Steve Mains. We're seeing, of course, the embedded PRTs going into units, and so we -- you know, we have a number of different flavors of PRTs in Iraq: some that are led by State Department folks, some that are actually embedded into the military units.

So I think they're trying to, kind of, get at the issue that you brought up, although there's -- there's an awful lot of effort to not take them over by the military, to allow the Department of State and the other, you know, real experts in reconstruction to lead those as well. So you have kind of a hybrid right now.

Q But if I could follow up. But if you're going to make more -- if, in the future, you're going to make this more of a State Department mission, which is -- which is not bad because they're State Department people -- you've got to either give them a budgets, or you're going to find a way where they can horn-in to the local budgets, because if you're in a situation where the PRT leader and the ground commander don't get along, what's the PRT guy going to do, go home? You know, then he -- then he can't do anything.

COL. MAINS: Yeah, I think we both agree.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

And, Matt Armstrong.

Are you still with us?

Q Hi, this is Matt from Mountain Runners. We're sorry for the delay and for the -- for the background noise. I'm sitting in my outdoor office at Starbucks. (Laughter.) Following up on Andrew Lubin's comments -- which is right in line with what I was looking at, is this integration issue.

It seems like there's an issue here, do we go with just -- he's the guy that threw it out there, Thomas Barnett's "sys admin." concept as some sort of blended scenario of, you know, DOD and State's. Or, do you want to go with a pure State's, which is, as you've noted, there's limitations, not just financially, but operationally, and functionally, and a whole bunch of other issues -- so that you still have a bifurcated solution.

What do you see as -- what do you want to have happen? I mean, how do you see it working out best?

MR. MCCOY: I could give you my opinion -- and this is Michael McCoy's opinion, it's not necessarily the opinion of anybody else. What I see eventually happening in the future is there is an initiative on the table that brings out what they call Advance Civilian Teams, which is a Department of State organization which is supposed to operate much like a PRT at the national level, and they have what they call a forward Advance Civilian Team, which will look like -- just much like a PRT.

These are civilian-run organizations. The problem they're going to have -- and they recognize that right now -- is they make sure they must be manned properly and funded properly. That is being worked at the interagency level. That is something we don't expect to see to be out in the -- it's a future issue, it's not a today issue. When I look at today -- and how to organize and what we should and should not do, there is something that can be said for the Afghanistan model on how things are being done, on the fact that it's a military organization within a military framework. The problem that you still have is that brigade commander was not given any budget for a reconstruction team, so he's still having to feed them out of (hide?).

Now that's slowly being addressed, as I understand it, from my friends that are in the business of working budgets and palming (ph), to give them a little bit more money to pay for that in Afghanistan. I think they're working the same deal in the budget and the (palming ?) world for the embedded PRTs. But I think they're going to see a little bit more funding at the brigade level so they can actually pay for this.

However, comma, for the PRTs that are supposedly acting alone or standing alone, or even when they're paired, it's still a Department of State agency, and Department of State has not the experts in that budgeting world that we do in the Department of Defense, and they have to rely on us to help them right their budgeting and palming (ph) issues. And we are working with them to make sure that they can get budget lines in through Congress.

So I think -- probably not with this fiscal year's budget, but next year's fiscal year budget, my indications are that you might see an increase in money on our Department of State side, so we might see that part of the problem go away.

Q Now that brings the question up about the integration, because if we're talking about, you know, security environments -- Afghanistan and Iraq and future locations, there needs to be some sort of deep integration with the security apparatus. And so, you know, there's a reliance on private security companies now, how do you see that being rectified? Wouldn't that be better inclusion with military structure?

MR. MCCOY: I think that the issue of security in dealing with -- and I've got to separate the private security companies from how the military operates. I do know that when I get northern Iraq, that the PRT teams see more help from the private security sector than the U.S. military, but that's the way the contract was worded up there.

But that's also in the same time starting to change, because in Iraq they're starting to develop what's called a common action plan where, even with the paired PRTs, they're trying to develop a plan with the division so that the whole operation in the counterinsurgency and the reconstruction is being married, and there is one focus as we go along.

I don't know what that current -- where they sit right now. It is a plan that's been put in effect starting in June. We're hoping to get more and more information -- is it working, is it not working -- from our embeds. But the issue that I'm hearing from our folks is that at least the direction from the top is that you have to work together. You have a common mission. One feeds on the other. If you don't work together, maybe it's time one of you ought to be replaced.

That's the word I'm getting from our embeds. And it seems like they've worked together, because every division and every PRT has put together a common plan. Whether it's executionable, that's what we're trying to find out.

Q Great, thanks. Jack, can I now do a follow-up now on a different question, or do you want to go around the circle again?

MR. HOLT: No, go right ahead. We've got a few -- we've got some more time here, so why don't you go ahead and follow up. Then we'll go back around.

Q Great. On a different topic, again on -- back onto the interagency element, has State's reticence been in any way related to what they see as an overarching limitation of (Smith-Muntz ?), even to do a presentation, a PowerPoint to a small audience, they need to get clearance if they're using even a jpeg that was used in an overseas brochure. Do you find any of that coming out and why they don't want to label the CALL publication?

MR. MCCOY: It is -- I would say that it's a how-you-were- brought-up type of issue. In the Department of Defense, I'd say we're more brought up to make our decision-makers at the lower level. The Department of State and other agencies tend to elevate the decision at a much higher level than we see in the Department of Defense. And that's what I think the problem is more than anything else is that where you make the decision is at a different level.

We do fairly well on making decisions at the '06. They're not fairly good at making decisions at the GS-15. That's just based on what I've seen in my working with the interagency, both with the Department of State and a few of the others. The 15s, they're there. They're empowered to a certain degree. But the final decision always has to rest with an SES. Q Okay, thanks.

COL. MAINS: Yes. You know, this is Steve Mains. What I would say, though, is that at the grassroots level, the worker level, they have been very eager to provide their input. And so, you know, we've gotten great interaction from them, and I kind of say we're building this interagency cooperation from the ground up; that, you know, as these folks become more familiar with DOD or with the other interagency players and then they move up in the organization, I think we're going to see a lot more cooperation in the future.

Q That's great. Thanks.

MR. MCCOY: And let me add something. When you look at how the field is actually operating -- this is the squirrely part in the whole conversation -- when you look at a PRT with the Department of State -- your act person, your Department of Defense, USAID -- working within a PRT, there's no issues of coordination. Things are being coordinated amongst themselves, they're getting things done. They make a decision in a very timely manner and they move smartly within the area they can do.

Now, when they get outside of that area they can do, they have to start to elevate it up. And as they elevate it up, more players start to come in and they want to put their will into play. And that's what we're seeing is that as the grassroots are being taught how to work together, it elevates up as they get promoted through the system.

They're used to shaking hands a lot more, where before they used to be at odds. So in the long run, what you're going to see, I think, is the PRT is going to add to the interagency having better cooperation as these people become the leaders of the future.

MR. HOLT: All right. And any other follow-up questions?

Q Yes. This is Andrew Lubin again from OnPoint. I'll address it to both of you gentlemen. Is there a difference in the PRT processes when you're in a country like Afghanistan that's a relatively functioning country with a functioning government and people who are locals who are interested versus Iraq, where we're really going to build something from the ground up, including an infrastructure and banks and phone lines and everything else?

MR. MCCOY: The actual functions of what a PRT does in Afghanistan versus Iraq are essentially always the same. You're interacting with the local provisional government or a municipality to try to establish a program that will advance some sort of national objective.

Why Afghanistan tends to work a little bit better is because the government is a little more structured and they don't seem to have the in-house fighting that we see in Iraq. So, therefore, the program seems to be more focused, whereas in Iraq, with the competing entities, the focus is not as defined. It's more in general terms. And I think that's what the difference is, that at the national level there's a difference, but at the grassroots I think both the PRTs in either country are accomplishing the missions about the same way. How do you get a program into place? How do you get the locals to buy on the program? And then you look to see how does this program tie into the national objective? The definitions are a little bit better in Afghanistan than they are Iraq.

Q Okay, do you have time for another one?

MR. HOLT: Sure. Yeah, go ahead.

Q Hey, guys, do you have anything, or can I keep going?

MR. MCCOY: Sure, go ahead.

Q Great, okay. Do you envision the possibility, in a country like Iraq, where the national government is more dysfunctional than the local governments, where we've got to put some sort of national PRT together? Because they need it.

COL. MAINS: Well, yes. This is Steve Mains. You know, I think that we are really doing that. You know, there are teams that are at the ministry level trying to cobble that part together as well as these PRTs that are down in the provinces trying to get basic services working and jump-start the economy and do all those sorts of things.

So we have not focused on that higher-level set of teams. But, you know, what we've been focused on really are the guys that are out in the field. And that's kind of our -- you know, that's our area of expertise. You know, we go out and try to pick up what's working in the field and then spread that to the other guys that need it. So we haven't done a specialized look, for instance, at the Ministry of Migration or Ministry of Oil or somebody like that.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. Anyone else? Anything else?

Okay, well, gentlemen, thank you very much for being with us this afternoon, Colonel Steve Mains, director of the Center for Army Lessons Learned, and Mr. Mike McCoy, the author for the PRT handbook. Thank you very much for joining us. Hopefully we can follow up and see how things are going and speak again here in the near future.

COL. MAINS: Okay, look forward to it. Thank you very much for your time as well.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you, sir.

END.